

An Analysis of Violin and Viola Instructors' Opinions of Using the Third Position as the Home Position for Beginning-Level Violin/Viola Education

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Abstract

Despite the existence of educators who use the third position as the home position for beginner violin training and get positive results, repertoires of violin pedagogues and current music school curricula show an overwhelming preference for the first position. I determined that studies on this preference and research related to the use of the third position technique as an alternative in beginner violin/viola education were scant and narrow in scope, and sent a questionnaire to violin/viola teachers to garner their views. Ninety-four participants who wrote comments in Part 4 of the questionnaire made up the study's sample. The study aimed both to contribute to the literature in the field of string and music pedagogy while triggering other efforts investigating use of the technique, and to directly transfer to readers the respondents' opinions. The study concluded that scantiness of research may be responsible for why the technique has not become widespread and related teaching resources are scarce. It would be appropriate to conduct further studies about using the third-position beginning technique as an alternative.

Introduction

Method books written for beginner violin/viola education predominantly use the first position as the home position. However, it is known that violin/viola pedagogues who prefer higher positions in teaching beginner stages have developed different methods. Despite the existence of pedagogues who select the third position as the home position from among these methods and who, although negligible in number, have even written method books using the technique, books based on the first position noticeably dominate contemporary curricula. The scarcity of scientific research explaining the basis of such a preference led me to conduct a survey of opinions and attitudes of violin/viola teachers toward the use of the third position as the home position. This study's scope is limited to the investigation of the comments in Part 4 of the

survey questionnaire. In the rest of this document, the word *violin* will refer to the viola as well, because the basic playing and education systems are the same for both instruments.

As Gruenberg (1919) illustrated in detail in his study, in the third position the fleshy part underneath the left thumb is in contact with the right rib of the violin. Many pedagogues associate this contact with the advantages of using the third position as the home position. In his 1969 dissertation Cowden explored the benefits expressed by many pedagogues, summarizing them as follows in a subsequent article he wrote in 1972.

- (a) the half steps and whole steps lie closer together, (b) the fourth finger is used immediately, (c) much of fatigue resulting from holding the instrument in the first position is circumvented, (d) the body of the violin serves as a reminder when the heel of the left hand is getting out of position, (e) it is possible to test intonation by placing the first finger on all strings except G, because the first finger in this position is one octave higher than the next lower open string, (f) the instrument can be held more easily, (g) the tonic of the key falls on the first finger, and (h) some useful rote playing tricks are made possible because the fingers and the tones of the key are called by the same number. (Cowden 1972, 505)

Shattuck (1933), Massau (1934), Koutzen (1951), and Angus (1959) wrote method books with the third position as the home position, and the reasons for their preference of the technique overlap with the advantages that Cowden determined. On the other hand, there are those who maintain that the third position is disadvantageous in the beginner stage for reasons like the inability to use open strings in scale exercises (Applebaum: 1986), the unavailability of method books, and the difficulty of obtaining a good sound in the third position (Rolland: 1952); in fact, there is a pedagogical approach that precludes the left hand from contacting the violin's body in any way while in the third position (Yankelevich: 1983, Lankovsky: 2016).

The discussion of advantages and disadvantages has persisted from Cowden's day to the present. Indeed, a close look at two forums, both of which are located in the www.violinist.com

website (2011, 2016), and one of which was initiated because of this study's call for participation in its survey, demonstrates that the discussions of advantages and disadvantages today match the assertions made in the first half of the 20th Century.

Altimari (1937) developed a new system in which he used the third position as the home position in his dissertation entitled "A New Approach to Violin Teaching," which is the first academic work involving the third-position beginning technique. Altimari's preference stemmed from his conviction that contrary to the first position, the third position is the most natural for the left hand and arm, and facilitates teaching and performing certain specific techniques. Another academic and first experimental study is Cowden's (1969) dissertation, "A Comparison of the Effectiveness of First and Third Position Approaches to Violin Instruction." Cowden did an experimental study of two separate groups who began violin education with the first and third positions, respectively, and found no significant difference between the groups. Likewise, Baker's (2014) single case study of five beginner students revealed no meaningful difference in efficacy between first or third position use.

In addition to the works cited above, two questions related to the use of the third position as the home position are noted in a survey by Sievers (2005). From the responses to both questions, it is evident that the respondents preferred the first position as the home position.

A literature review revealed that the studies conducted on the technique of starting from the third position are few. The absence of method books that use the third position beginning technique from current curricula seems to be associated with this conspicuous gap in scientific research. And the continuation of discussions of advantages and disadvantages since the 20th Century to date reflects the interest in the use of this technique. The objective of the study of the comments section of the survey I initiated, based on the above considerations, was to both contribute to the literature in the field of string and music pedagogy and trigger new research, and

transfer directly to readers the thoughts and attitudes about this technique of educators who participated in the survey.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study is limited to an investigation of Part 4, that is, the comments section, of my survey questionnaire consisting of four parts, which was designed to garner violin and viola instructors' opinions about using the third position as the home position. The survey was accessible from 15.05.2016 until 15.08.2016 and was disseminated internationally to various associations, schools, and experts. Respondents who left notes in the comments section in Part 4 of the survey made up the sampling of the study. In addition, comments sent as part of e-mail responses to the survey and the opinions stated in various places in the questionnaire were included in the study. Consequently 94 participants made up the study sample. (The names and details of institutions, schools, universities can be viewed in Appendix A.)

I included the original comments of the survey participants as they were, in English, with no revision or editing, except for spelling and punctuation corrections in a few places. Comments by participants who answered the survey in Turkish were translated into English. (All original 94 comments can be viewed in Appendix B.)

Data Analysis

I processed the comments of 94 participants in eight predetermined categories. Prominence of the main topic addressed in each comment determined the category in which it would be treated. After presenting the original comments in each category, I wrote brief summaries of the comments both by

category and outside the category. However, it was necessary to make an exception in the case of “Those who have not heard of, and/or have not given thought to, and/or have little opinion about the technique” category, as the comments under this heading were related more to the attitudes and statuses of the participants than their opinions. The summary headings therefore differ from the rest of the categories. The Fisher Freeman Halton test was applied for the comparison of the categories determined in this study and the areas of expertise that emerged from the participants' profile.

The Categories

Category 1: Those who prefer beginning techniques other than the first and/or third position

Category 2: Those who believe the left hand should not contact the violin in the third position

Category 3: Those who think method books are scarce, or could be used if they existed

Category 4: Those who prefer the first position

Category 5: Those who have not heard of, and/or have not given thought to, and/or have little opinion about the technique

Category 6: Those who think the third position is advantageous, and/or use/have used/think they could use the third position

Category 7: Those who think the beginning position should be selected according to each student's needs

Category 8: Those who find the study interesting and necessary; critiques and suggestions

The participants' areas of expertise were evaluated in seven discrete combinations derived from their responses to the first question in the questionnaire (You are a...?). Expertise area distributions were made both generally and per category. The three response choices for the first question were used in the tables with the following abbreviations:

Violinist: VN

Violist: VA

Music Teacher: MT

Category: C

Results

Distribution of the 94 participants by seven combinations of areas of expertise is shown in the tables below.

Table 1: You are a?

| | VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|---|------|-----|-----|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| n | 12 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 20 | 7 | 35 |
| % | 12.8 | 7.4 | 4.3 | 9.6 | 21.3 | 7.4 | 37.2 |

A comparison was made of the categories and the areas of expertise of the participants. Because the data were few, Category 2, 7 and area of expertise as music teacher were excluded from the comparison. However, the number of music teachers in the VN-VA-MT, VA-MT, AND VN-MT areas of expertise was adequate to include this area of expertise in the comparison. The analysis showed no significant difference.

Table 2: Comparison of the categories and areas of expertise with the Fisher Freeman Halton test

| p=0,677; P>0,05 | | | Areas of Expertise | | | | | | Total |
|---|----|--------------|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| | | | VN | VA | VN.VA | VN.MT | VA.MT | VN.VA.MT | |
| C A T E G O R I E | C1 | Count | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| | | % within tip | 18,2% | 14,3% | 0,0% | 10,0% | 0,0% | 16,1% | 12,0% |
| | C3 | Count | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 13 |
| | | % within tip | 9,1% | 14,3% | 33,3% | 15,0% | 0,0% | 16,1% | 15,7% |
| | C4 | Count | 4 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 7 | 21 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| S | % within tip | 36,4% | 14,3% | 0,0% | 35,0% | 40,0% | 22,6% | 25,3% |
| | C5 Count | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 12 |
| | % within tip | 0,0% | 28,6% | 22,2% | 15,0% | 40,0% | 9,7% | 14,5% |
| C6 | Count | 3 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 18 |
| | % within tip | 27,3% | 0,0% | 33,3% | 15,0% | 20,0% | 25,8% | 21,7% |
| C8 | Count | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 9 |
| | % within tip | 9,1% | 28,6% | 11,1% | 10,0% | 0,0% | 9,7% | 10,8% |
| Total | Count | 11 | 7 | 9 | 20 | 5 | 31 | 83 |
| | % within tip | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% |

Category 1: Those who prefer beginning techniques other than the first and/or third position

Table 3: Distribution of a total of 11 participants in category 1 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> | 0 | 2 | 0 | <u>5</u> |

The opinions in this category of 11 comments in total are summarized in 3 points:

- i) It is not advisable to study in a fixed position for a an extended period of time because of the concern that this may lead the student to develop a fear of position shifts;
- ii) High positions, like the fourth, are the most appropriate/comfortable beginning positions;
- iii) It is important for the student to develop a feel for the entire fingerboard at an early age and from the beginning of training.

Comments outside the category heading:

- i) Students with weak fingers at the beginning stage may have difficulty pressing on the strings at high positions;

- ii) The first position may be conducive to getting a good sound;
- iii) The contact point in the third position helps the wrist take the proper shape;
- iv) The first position is not the most natural and comfortable position;
- v) There may be benefits to using the third position as the home position.

Category 2: Those who believe the left hand should not contact the violin in the third position

Table 4: Distribution of a total of 4 participants in category 2 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|----|----|----|---------|---------|----------|--------------|
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | <u>1</u> | <u>3</u> |

The opinions in this category of 4 comments in total are summarized in 4 points:

- i) The left hand may contact the right rib of the violin only as of the fourth position;
- ii) The left hand may contact the violin’s rib only when the student is using an overly large instrument;
- iii) Allowing the left hand to contact the violin in the third position is a wrong pedagogical method;
- iv) The third position is not a home position because the left hand is not placed at the end of the neck while in the third position.

Comments outside the category heading:

- i) The first position is the most appropriate position to begin;
- ii) Learning the positions in sequence is appropriate for education;
- iii) A separate strategy can be set for each student in beginner training;
- iv) Because of the open strings, and for good intonation, it is advantageous to learn major and minor scales in the first position;

- v) The first and third positions can be used simultaneously in the beginning stage.

Category 3: Those who think method books are scarce, or could be used if they existed

Table 5: Distribution of a total of 16 participants in category 3 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|----|----|----|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 |

The opinions in this category of 16 comments in total are summarized in 5 points:

- i) Method books starting violin/viola education in the third position are rare;
- ii) There are educators who are willing to use the technique if method books beginning with the third position are available;
- iii) Lack of method books would create difficulties for those who want to use the technique in group lessons;
- iv) Method books available in schools ubiquitously use the first position as the home position;
- v) Books using the technique are little known.

Comments outside the category heading:

- i) The third position ensures that the left hand takes a natural holding position;
- ii) The third position as the home position may offer an advantage for viola, which is heavier and larger than the violin;
- iii) The third position may be problematic for intonation;
- iv) Method books using the third position as the home position may have advantages in training children over eight years old, as this group can experience greater difficulty in learning position shifts compared to younger children;

- v) Different positions can be preferred or used concurrently in beginner education, based on the students' needs;
- vi) It may be useful to use the third-position beginning technique for children aged 5 – 8 years to reduce the tension caused by the distance between the left arm and the violin;
- vii) The ability to control the first and second fingers with open strings in the third position may help with intonation at the beginning stage;
- viii) Using high positions, like the third or fourth, and doing harmonics and shifting exercises in beginner training, may help familiarize the student with the fingerboard and ensure understanding the layout of the instrument;
- ix) No thought has been given previously to using the third-position beginning technique;
- x) Further pedagogical research and studies are needed to use the technique.

Category 4: Those who prefer the first position

Table 6: Distribution of a total of 21 participants in category 4 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|----|----|----|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 7 |

The opinions in this category of a total of 21 comments can be summarized in 7 points:

- i) Unlike the first position, it is not easy to determine whether the left wrist is flexible or rigid in the third position;
- ii) Learning the first position after the third may create problems in understanding the layout of the instrument and perceiving the distance between the fingers; the first position is necessary to learn the basic playing principles;
- iii) Open strings, which are easily used in the first position for scale exercises to obtain good intonation and to control intonation, are also necessary to play the

repertoires/songs used in beginner training. Beginning in the third position may therefore be disadvantageous;

- iv) The third position technique does not offer an extra advantage in the beginner stage;
- v) Using the first position in crowded and group classes yields positive results;
- vi) When the third-position beginning technique is used, the left arm is at an increased risk of bearing the weight of the instrument, especially the viola, which is larger and heavier than the violin;
- vii) There is concern that reaching for lower strings may strain the hand in the third position.

Comments outside the category heading:

- i) The third position may be beneficial therapeutically and for students with physical disabilities;
- ii) The beginning position may be chosen according to each student;
- iii) It is necessary to shift to the third position soon after the first;
- iv) The third position may be favorable for the left wrist;
- v) The participants would like to be informed of the experiences of educators who have used the third-position beginning technique and obtained positive results;
- vi) Some participants have not considered using the third-position beginning technique earlier.

Category 5: Those who have not heard of, and/or have not given thought to, and/or have little opinion about the technique

Table 7: Distribution of a total of 12 participants in category 5 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 |

The findings and statuses determined in this category of 12 comments in total are summarized under 4 points:

- i) Those who had never heard of the third-position beginning technique;
- ii) Those who are aware of the technique, but lack much information about and/or experience with it, or who have not given much thought to it;
- iii) Those who think further research, development of pedagogical methods, and training of teachers are needed for the technique to be applied;
- iv) The perception that the study is interesting and intriguing, and the demand to learn the results.

Findings and statuses outside the category heading:

- i) Those who use left hand pizzicato and harmonics techniques in beginner training and prefer the third position to apply these techniques;
- ii) Those who think the third position may be helpful for the left wrist to take its natural shape;
- iii) Those who think they might try this technique;
- iv) Those who think the first position may be helpful in learning how to use the left thumb;
- v) Those who think the interval of a fourth between the open string and the first finger may prove awkward for beginners to get the correct intonation;
- vi) Those who maintain that the first position is preferred for beginner group classes and that the current repertoire is geared for this technique.

Category 6: Those who think the third position is advantageous, and/or use/have used/think they could use the third position

Table 8: Distribution of a total of 18 participants in category 6 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|----|----|----|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 8 |

The opinions in this category of 18 comments in total are summarized in 11 points.

- i) Proximity of the left arm to the violin in the third position prevents tension and helps the left wrist easily take a natural angle;
- ii) Use of the fourth finger is easy in the third position;
- iii) Shortness of the distance between the fingers in the third position reduces tension, which may be beneficial particularly for beginner-stage students with small hands;
- iv) Starting in the third position may prevent the anxiety of playing in high positions;
- v) For adult beginners, using the third-position technique may be particularly helpful;
- vi) The third-position technique can be preferred in the case of students who have problems with the shape of the left wrist or other problems;
- vii) The third-position technique may provide an advantage with children under five years of age;
- viii) There is interest and willingness to try the third-position technique;
- ix) The ability to control the first and second fingers with open strings in the third position is an advantage;
- x) A student started on the violin in the third position can use a larger instrument and thus can obtain a better tone;

- xi) The third-position technique can be used for students who are shifting from the violin to the viola.

Comments outside the category heading:

- i) There is a demand for more information about use of the third-position beginning technique;
- ii) The participants are open-minded about the use of different techniques;
- iii) A different position may be preferred for each student at the beginner stage;
- iv) The fourth position may be advantageous for the same reasons;
- v) The third-position technique can be used more easily in musical pieces involving open strings.

Category 7: Those who think a beginning position should be selected according to each student’s needs

Table 9: Distribution of a total of 3 participants in category 7 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| <u>1</u> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | <u>1</u> |

The opinions in this category with 3 comments in total are summarized in 2 points:

- i) The beginning position can be selected based on the student’s need;
- ii) Each position has its advantages.

Comments outside the category heading:

- i) The questionnaire should have included choices other than “Yes-No”;
- ii) The participants are curious about the study’s results.

Category 8: Those who find the study interesting and necessary; critiques and suggestions**Table 10:** Distribution of a total of 9 participants in category 8 by areas of expertise

| VN | VA | MT | VN / VA | VN / MT | VA / MT | VN / VA / MT |
|----|----|----|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 |

The opinions in this category of a total of 9 comments are summarized in 3 points:

- i) The survey on the third-position beginning technique should be repeated with students to determine their opinions;
- ii) The questionnaire should include “Maybe” or “Not sure” choices;
- iii) The participants find the topic interesting and want to follow up on its results.

Discussion

Of the 94 Individuals who participated in this study, 70.2% are both music teachers and violinists or violists, or educators with experience in both instruments. Their high rate of participation in the study is evidence that music teachers consider the place of violin and viola in basic musical education important, and monitor new studies and their outcomes. Beginner violin or viola education is far from being limited to a professional purpose or to professional musicians, it is also offered by music teachers in public schools. Therefore, participation of music teachers in my study is significant from the perspective of contribution of the research results not only to the field of string pedagogy, but to music education in general. The lack of a significant difference as a result of the comparison of the categories and areas of expertise may be interpreted as evidence that beginner violin/viola education needs to be explored as thoroughly in the field of music education as in the field of string pedagogy. In brief, even if beginner violin/viola education take place toward different purposes and in different settings, it should be

approached based on the same fundamental principles. Indeed, educators can be either violinists or violists, as well as music teachers.

Among the participants, 46.8% are both violinists and violists. Even though the basic principles for the violin and the viola are the same, inclusion of participants who are proficient in both instruments in the study helped increase the reliability of results related to the assessment of the third-position beginning technique. Indeed, while it was noted in the “Those who think method books are scarce, or could be used if they existed” category that the technique could be used especially in the case of viola, which is heavy, in the “Those who prefer the first position” category, the view was expressed that it would not be appropriate to begin viola in the third position because of the instrument’s weight.

The similarities and differences across 94 comments in eight different categories are as necessary as they are a natural echo of instrument education. Especially when one-to-one instrument training is considered, a different approach may be needed for each individual student. Indeed, in this study there are respondents in both the “Those who think the beginning position should be selected according to each student’s needs” category and in other categories, who state that the starting position should be determined based on need. Viewed from this perspective, it is obvious that efforts toward the use of the third-position starting technique as an alternative in violin/viola education would be useful and contribute to education.

The expressed views of advantages and disadvantages of the third-position starting technique can be discussed. However, scarcity of the necessary materials hinders educators and students who feel a need to use the technique. The focus by 16 participants in this study upon the lack of methods meshes with Rolland’s (1952) finding, and shows that despite the passage of close to a century, the problem remains.

Even in the category “Those who prefer the first position,” which had the highest proportion of participants (22,3%), the opinion was expressed that the third position may be advantageous for the left wrist, and, in fact, can be used therapeutically. Taking into consideration the comments in the same category that the beginning position can be selected according to the student, it stands to reason that efforts to develop and apply different techniques will contribute to creating a portfolio that teachers of similar or different schools can each benefit from. The comments in the “Those who prefer beginning techniques other than the first and/or third position” reflect the experiences of educators who use many different techniques, and also support this claim.

The comments in the “Those who have not heard of, and/or have not given thought to, and/or have little opinion about the technique” category can be explained by the scarcity of scientific studies done on the third-position beginning technique and the lack of resource materials. These deficiencies hamper the use and expansion of the third-position beginning technique. One objective of the study was to increase awareness of this fact, in addition to contributing to the literature in the field of string and music pedagogy. Indeed, participants in this study also expressed their interest and curiosity regarding use of the technique, in categories other than “Those who find the study interesting and necessary; critiques and suggestions.”

The comments in the “Those who think the third position is advantageous, and/or use/have used/think they could use the third position” category can be construed as evidence that there are educators who use the technique at present, want to use it, and are curious about it. On the other hand, although representative of a noticeably low proportion of the respondents (4.2%), the category “Those who believe the left hand should not contact the violin in the third position” reflects the view of educators who do not consider appropriate the contact that the left hand forms with the violin in the third position. The only important factor among all these differences is that

the necessary studies and materials should be produced for those who prefer to use the contact in the third position at the beginning stage, even if they represent a minority.

It is obvious that inclusion of further research on the use of the third position as the home position, especially in studies related to the string pedagogy field, will pave the way for educators who want to use the technique to access more information and materials. Efforts in this area may run the gamut from experimental studies, to production of new materials, and to development of teacher training programs on pedagogical approaches for those who use the technique.

Consideration for both individual and group training in all such studies is essential for music education in public schools, especially for students who do not have the means to take private violin/viola lessons or can't afford going to music schools.

Appendix A

The list of institutions and schools that shared the survey with their faculty members and teachers through e-mail or over social media and the distribution of the respondents are as follows:

Australia and New Zealand Viola Society: 5
International Viola Society: 9
Association for Music in International Schools: 8
Association of Music Educators (Vic), Inc: 10
Australian Society for Music Education: 1
British Columbia Music Educators Association: 1
European String Teachers Association: 10
Institute of Registered Music Teachers of New Zealand: 2
Music schools/universities in Canada, Israel, and Spain: 2

Appendix B

Category 1: Those who prefer beginning techniques other than the first and/or third position

i) For classroom violin setting around 20 6 yr olds we start in 3rd/4th position and play open strings with this simple hold, then harmonics and left hand pizz for good LH shape. We don't read but get familiar with how it feels.

ii) I also use flageolets, which gives the hand training in lateral movement

iii) It may be that starting in 4th position is better than 3rd....

iv) Hello, I use colourstrings method and I know well Paul Rolland precepts. If I don't use specifically third position to begin, I use a lot of pizzicato Left Hand and shifts with flageolets. I think that the more important is that the pupil doesn't be afraid to move his hand and doesn't stay in first position during many years. Bravo for your questionnaire and good luck!

v) Question 4 re number of years teaching experience I found hard to understand (was it Beginner teacher or teacher of beginner students that was meant). Re starting in 3rd position, I think there is also a case for starting in 4th position as this puts the hand in better contact with the violin/viola body. Good luck with your research.

vi) I prefer to use a variety of positions as soon as possible so the students feel happy to move around the instrument. If a young student has weak fingers the higher positions can be a problem because it is less easy to push the strings down, especially on student instruments. It is also easier to make a good sound in first position and this can be vital to build confidence. I often introduce the octave harmonics at the start using the 4th finger as this brings the hand above the string and also encourages a good left elbow position.

vii) Starting in any position and staying there for some time only encourages static tensions. Better is to do immediate shifting through plucking open strings with fourth or third finger, and plucking up and down the entire length of the string.

viii) I think 4th or 5th position is even better than 3rd as the body of the instrument helps aligning the hand.

ix) My beginners start by finding rest position--covering the octave mark of the string with their left fingers. We do basic shifting and vibrato motions starting from fourth position. Same for bass and cello--if the student starts at the curvy part where the neck meets the ribs of the instrument, they are not afraid of shifting and vibrato like I was as a student. We then learn actual notes starting in first position. I believe the Bornoff method starts students in third position learning notes, but I have not used it. I'm trained in Rolland pedagogy.

x) I've used Paul Rolland's concept of having beginners place their 4th finger over the octave harmonic which divides the string in equal parts. Although this is technically "fourth position," the concept is the same as starting in third position because the heel of the left hand has the rib of the violin to help the student avoid bending the wrist backward into a flattened shape (which some teachers call a "pancake").

xi) They need to feel the whole fingerboard – this speeds up the process of understanding left and right hand and using the ear considerably. It allows the kids to be doing major concerti and caprices by the age of 10. Actually, fourth position is ideal for most. I mostly teach students that participate in major international competitions – at all ages, from 10-30. However, I have taught many younger players in my teaching career. I totally agree with you that first position is not the most natural or comfortable. I believe that fourth position is most comfortable. However, especially on small violins, the longer string length of first position makes a considerably better

tone, so it is a balance. Overall, I have come to teaching young children to use all of the fingerboard from day 1 by practicing things such as octave shifts. If students hear, feel, and understand the strings from a very young age, they do not get locked into this reading of first position and its inherent physical problems, especially as regards the thumb and first finger. I believe that the basic premise of your thesis is correct and certainly, solving tension issues by using the middle positions is ideal. Good luck with your work!! It is always fun to discuss pedagogy.

Category 2: Those who believe the left hand should not contact the violin in the third position

i) In third position there should still be no left hand contact with the ribs. That is bad pedagogy, so I suggest that you look into your questionnaire further, or use correctly fitted violins with your students. It seems to me that you would be using third position as a way of getting around teaching on oversized instruments, which is not a valid reason for starting them in this position.

ii) a) If the violin or viola is not too big for the student, the "heel" of the hand only touches the shoulder of the instrument in fourth position, not the third. b) Building major and minor scales up from the open strings in first position is the best way to acquire a sense of good intonation. c) In individual lessons, I create individual strategies!

iii) Touching the body of the instrument as part of teaching the third position can create a bad habit to the student; being used to search for this touch, when they grow older and play a full size instrument, it is the fourth position that's close to the instrument, so they have an extra unneeded movement to correct. Starting from the first position and teaching other positions by order (2, 3 etc.) creates much healthier habits in my opinion and experience.

iv) Third position will never feel like "home" because it's not at the end of the neck and one tone higher than an open string is easily found logically by adding one finger. Third position is however a good point to start students WITH first position at the same time. Why the separation? It seems that we assume that the pedagogical trajectory to put a student on demands that we teach one position at a time.... I think students' brains can cope with the neck being a continuum from day one. My junior orchestras play hot cross buns with 1 finger in all keys from the first couple of months of tuition.

Category 3: Those who think method books are scarce, or could be used if they existed

i) I think starting in the third position may help the student to build a better left hand shape rather than starting in the first position but at the same time it may create some difficulties about finding the right places of the fingers in that position and intonation problems if they are not introduced with the first position. I do not have any experience about starting in the third position with my students but if I found some methods I would try.

ii) My experience with teaching is still limited but I have found that the children who start violin before age 8 are more flexible cognitively than their older counterparts. This means that for a six year old, switching between positions is not a hurdle whereas the older kids past age 8 seem to think that moving between positions is difficult and is thus reluctant to try it and practice it. I

think that if a method can be devised to teach older kids in third in a structured way similar to the Colourstrings method then it could surely open up a world of possibilities.

iii) The lack of resources (method books) makes this approach challenging for large class instruction.

iv) I think there is a difference between beginners on violin and viola, and think this could be more beneficial for beginning viola players because the instrument is quite large and heavy for young beginners. Also beginners with a tendency to collapse their wrist inwards could find help by starting in third position, but for the musical development it is not great. There are limitations to the songs beginners can play in the beginning in third position, and motivation might suffer because of this.

v) I have never considered this question before, but the method books our school provides are all starting in 1st position, so I just carried on doing that as it was the way I learned. I have to have method books which cover violin and viola because the occasional student who enrolls for learning viola has to be accommodated along with the beginner violins. I'm not sure I filled in the question of how many years correctly. I took it that the columns are for beginner/intermediate/advanced students? As our music school is associated with a primary school, most of my students only stay until they join a high school orchestra. A few stay on long after they are adults in which case we play lots of chamber music together.

vi) Dear, I never started violin education for my students with 3rd position. Instead of that I preferred 1st position. But, now I can imagine that education may begin with 3rd position. It would be easier for holding the instrument and shape of hands (both right and left) more correctly. Specially this may be valid for the ages between 5-8 because of the length of the arm. If I can find a beginning book series for an education in this way, I would be on the side of violin education for any student from 3rd position. But, mostly the beginning books are aiming to begin with 1st position. I wish my best for you and for your thesis. Thank you very much for your mail that you considered me also.

vii) The choice about the home position may highly depend on specific needs and conditions of the student, such as physical/mental abilities, age, concentration capacity, motivation for enough practice, etc. I think the use of 3rd position as home position would be a choice for SOME students if there would be enough methods supporting this option. Without sufficient publication, it is hard to materialise. I would also like to emphasise that I would always consider this approach as subsidiary, a second option when beginning with first position does not work well enough.

viii) For beginner training method books generally start on the A string, and some on the D string. Although somewhat high for the arm level, the D string is appropriate for the child to repeat the melody in her/his voice range and because it is central relative to the other strings. The A sound is a more amenable sound for the child and puts the right arm a little closer to the body. I have never seen a beginner method book with the third position. I have heard of someone who had to begin violin this way. Long ago, a person was started on the violin in the third position because an instrument of appropriate size was not available and because the student's arms were too short for the full-size instrument. This person has retired from an opera orchestra. In my opinion if it is appropriate and useful, it can be tried. At any rate, it is not possible to say there is

one absolutely correct way in instrument training. The same type of uniform cannot be put on everyone. Should be tried out. The only question in my mind is whether intonation would become even more difficult. Need to try...

ix) Incidentally I think that I should add to my replies that I did start on a few occasions in third position because it is easier for some beginners to match the first finger against an open string (octave), but I never went beyond some spacing patterns because of lack of beginners texts. Prof Igor Ozim last month was telling us in Ljubljana that from 3rd position the violin is held by the collar-bone and hand. This brings to mind that starting in 3rd position minimizes problems that relate to shoulder rests. [E.G. With shoulder rests, the process of locating tension in neck and arm may be somewhat retarded.] A very cleverly thought out questionnaire. Perhaps, the word STARTING might be defined as consisting of a number of lessons, between "x" and "y".

x) It is a beneficial study for string teaching and especially for early beginners (4-5 years old). Depending on the student's hand shape I also considered the third position. and if there were books starting in the 3rd position, I would have more courage to do so..

xi) I would be willing to trial the method with good resource books. I don't think you should necessarily teach one position in absence of the other. Any child needs at least 2 years to gain confidence playing basic tunes on the violin and so if starting in 3rd position would need at least 2 books to gain confidence. Included in these books should be an introduction to 1st position. I like one of the tunes in Vamoosh book 1 where the children experiment with sliding the finger up the neck and back. I like the way harmonics have been introduced in the 2nd book of the Vamoosh series. So there needs to be opportunities to play in both positions. I have been teaching a long time and feel most important is getting the size of the violin right, and the comfort of how it fits the individual. Some chin rests are too high. If children are not pushed too quickly in their learning, and are given time to gain confidence then technique hopefully won't be compromised.

xii) I would need teacher training and research evidence to even consider this major pedagogy change. Current teaching materials for beginners are not available on this technique. I worry that students would be at a disadvantage in youth orchestras and festival auditions since their technique and position strategies might be vastly different. At this point, the only advantage I see is with students who might need physical accommodations.

xiii) It is interesting for me to consider the implications of starting students in third position. I do agree that started early on with shifted positions allows for familiarity entire fingerboard. I would equally preference starting in fourth position as the octave scale would commence on the adjacent open string pitch and would conclude on the harmonic, therefore establishing a good grounding of the 'geography' of the instrument. This survey itself has prompted me to consider how to integrate this approach more in my current teaching methodology. More method books specifically tailored to teaching in this way would be great.

xiv) I can see that teaching scales in 3rd position would have the advantage of the 1st finger corresponding with the first note of the scale, the 2nd finger with the 2nd note, etc., making the placement of the 1/2 step between 3rd and 4th, then 7th and 8th, more obvious. Establishing the 1st finger in tune an octave above the open string below could also have some advantages for

accuracy in intonation. I have never seen a method book that begins in 3rd position. I have heard of doing this with a child who is too small to reach 1st position on a full-sized instrument and has no access to a smaller instrument, but most beginners have ample access to an appropriately sized instrument. I prefer to use the approach (1st position) with which I was taught, and am most comfortable.

xv) I prefer to start beginning bass players in a higher position whenever possible, but I had never thought about it on violin/viola. I teach intermediate string orchestra in mixed-instrument groups of 15-25 and beginners in groups of 3-7 at an international school. I have not yet found a method book that begins in upper positions and is able to be used by all instruments concurrently in a classroom setting. I would be very interested to see how this might work in an ensemble setting such as mine. Obviously it would be much more feasible for individual students or those in same-instrument groupings. Good luck with your project!

xvi) It would require most method book and string repertoire to be rewritten with alternative part as it done for violin 3 viola parts now

Category 4: Those who prefer the first position

i) Every student is different. My fear with resting the heel of the hand against the rib of the instrument could mask hidden tension. How hard is the student gripping? It can be hard to see, whereas in first position, the wrist shows it all.

ii) The problem with starting in third position, as I see it, is that vln/vla players will be much more likely to use their arm to hold up the instrument. I believe that almost all the weight of the instrument should be held (comfortably!) by the neck/jaw/shoulder. While this isn't great for the neck/jaw/shoulder, it frees the hand to move around without holding the weight of the instrument. While this might be possible for violinists, it is simply not possible to hold the weight of the viola completely with your left arm. I know some people do this, and they get by OK. But I could not get around the viola if I was also holding its weight with my left arm. To get back in circular motion to your proposal to start students in third position, I think this encourages using the arm to hold up the weight of the instrument - too much.

iii) At one time, I thought that starting in third position had advantages, especially when a child's violin was too large. I actually tried this with some students, and quickly gave up on the idea, for the following reasons:

a. In first position, the first finger is the next note up the scale from the open string. This interval is much easier to grasp, and to verify intonation, than the interval of the fourth, between first finger and open string in third position. **b.** All beginning string pieces are built of intervals of the second and third. Almost never in beginning songs is there an interval of a fourth. This means that, if starting in third position, the simplicity of songs built of small intervals must be jettisoned. For these two reasons, and in spite of my belief that starting in third position makes a lot of ergonomic sense, I quickly abandoned the experiment. That said, I think if I had a student with physical disabilities, I would consider starting in third position (I have actually had such students, but their disabilities were so great that the starting position was irrelevant). Hope this is helpful.

iv) I think it is difficult to play in third position on the lower strings because it is awkward for the hand to reach. I believe it is better to start in first position, adapt to correct hand technique then introduce third position later. Not as late as years later but sooner than usual.

v) According to my opinion and my experiences beginning with the third position make a violinist candidate feel locked. Because the positions of violin become smaller gradually and if the violinist knows that from the beginning, can feel much more comfortable.

vi) I feel starting in first position makes sense, as it helps children grasp the geography of the instrument and how the notes relate to open strings.

vii) If the instrument is the correct size, I can see no advantage to starting a student in 3rd position. As long as they are taught good posture and technique it shouldn't matter which position they start in as they should be able to play in any position with ease as they develop.

viii) I don't think starting in third position is useful. The orientation of learning all the notes on the instrument from "bottom up" is more useful - by stopping the strings we create notes and they understand the first position is where stopped notes begin. Learning good form in the first position is easy with instruction and very important from the first lesson - this creates a good foundation. I've taught a very long time and have encountered many students with form issues - I think dealing with those issues directly is best - in first position!

ix) Most teachers will start students/pupils with first position, then third and/or half position next. After first position I teach both half and SECOND position next (especially important for violists, I believe) before introducing third position. Again, I teach mainly non-beginner older students.

x) The first position is my favorite.

xi) I have never used the third position starting method. I prefer students after to learn to hold the pencil. So never had a learner under 7 year old. After teaching to play g major scale on first position. I immediately teach to play on third position. It may be therapeutic for right hand to teach 3rd position. Thanks for question and the topic.

xii) Very interesting! I don't use the third position in the beginning for only one reason: the impossibility to play/sing/listen etc. a scale that begins with the open string. I think, it's very important. I know that the third position could be very good to learn the right position of the wrist but for me it's more important to teach the scale already in the beginning. But who knows: maybe I will experiment in the future?

xiii) I have never started a beginner in third position, but as soon as they learn first position notes and good posture and position, I teach them to shift to third position. This makes it easier later when they need to play more advanced music that requires third position.

xiv) In large class settings, I can't see third position being a great place to start. Personally, I have successfully been using first position and my strings groups have come out as award winning. I'll stick with what works.

xv) I have been teaching for over 25 years and always taught the violin to my student by starting from the first position. So if you ask me some question which has to be answered with the deep experience of a teacher who starts to teach the violin by third position of course to be able to respond it as a opposite way teacher is a bit difficult. Therefore oftenly my asnwrs were neutral on the part 2 of this survey... all my best

xvi) Finger spacing is different in third position compared to third position. Most beginning repertoire is written for first position. Placing the heel of the hand next to the bout in third position for a beginner will cause left-hand shape and wrist alignment problems when moving the hand/arm/wrist to first position. There are too many postural differences between third and first position to warrant beginning in third position.

xvii) Interesting...but... Open strings give string players the chance to focus on the bow and on tone production. If you start in III position, the open strings make less sense melodically. You'd need songs that make sense in III position, which would put the open strings "out of sequence" with the fingering patterns. What a shame to sacrifice both logic and tone quality for the "possible" advantages in the hand shape development...of which I am not entirely convinced. I struggle to imagine this approach in a group setting of 30 students, but I'd be interested to know more about it if there are teachers out there who find it successful.

xviii) This is very interesting from the physical point of view and I can see why it might be a good idea for setting up the left hand. However using first position seems to me to also have many musical advantages in terms of scales and arpeggios that resonate with the open string and so on. I think it depends a lot on the circumstances of the students. It could be good to set up the left hand in a higher position but add the lower positions fairly early on so that it does not become something "difficult" and so that all sorts of music can be played and all sorts of skills developed.

xix) There are no shortcuts to teaching the violin or viola. As much playing is done in first position it makes sense to start there. Use of third position also poses problems in reading notation and understanding the logic of the instrument. No technical problem is insurmountable given practice and commitment.

xx) Never considered starting a beginner in third instead of first. However, I have started third after only one year. xxi) In my opinion, I don't recommend to teach the third position at the first place. I go with the first position first, then third position. Because students need to learn the basic fingerings first and be used to the intonation. If you jump on the third position first, I think it could make student confusing. The Suzuki books and Homahn are widely used for the beginner, and those books also start by first position. I want to stick to what so called 'basic'.

Category 5: Those who have not heard of, and/or have not given thought to, and/or have little opinion about the technique

i) Thank you for the research about this very important topic. Unfortunately I do not have many information about the use of the third position to begin the study of these two instruments. Sometimes there are children that benefit from the use of such methods but the teachers should be qualified and educated to use these methods otherwise it is best for them and their pupils to keep using the traditional methods. I would like to be informed about the results of your research. Thank you again.

ii) I have not come across this as a concept; however, there are many preparatory movements, such as "raindrops fingers" - where the left thumb is under the instrument and the fingers sit curved on the shoulder, then tap in imitation of LH movement - which I use to shape the LH. I think the student would need to be very confident of larger intervals eg the fourth aurally which is less likely with younger beginners, but I am interested to know more about it as a theory. I'm in a fairly isolated area of Australia, which might explain why I haven't heard about this.

iii) I had never heard of starting students in 3rd position. I do use third position for plucking the strings to mold the hand at the very beginning but not with placing fingers on the fingerboard. I also use third position early in children's learning for playing harmonics and doing glissando. Playing early in third position would prevent the collapsed wrist that we all see begin to develop in some students. I work hard to ensure the hand is free and the wrist not bent when establishing first position playing.

iv) I don't teach beginners right now....have heard people discuss this method, but am not very familiar with it

v) Knowing third position is very important but I prefer to do first position first. Because they need to know how to use/ move thumb (left hand). As my experiences, moving thumb is very difficult to kids. But maybe starting 3rd position is a great idea. Going back to 1st position is more easier... This is very interesting.... I have never thought about it.

vi) This is the first time I hear about this use... I'm so curious about I would like to see methods and results! Good luck !!

vii) I haven't done much thinking on this idea. However, I would like to know about the results you reach at the end of your research. I would like to learn more about starting with the third position and see how more efficient and easier for students. I might consider to teach that way. Thank you...

viii) I have never considered starting my students in 3rd position only because I don't know anyone who has done it. I would be very curious to know the success of doing this, the reasons behind it, what is better about it than starting in 1st, AND if you can do this successfully in a mixed-instrument class. I start my beginners with cellos and bass and they all need to be playing the same things at the same time. This is how the method book is written and it makes it easy and it is successful. But I am very curious about this!

ix) I had no knowledge that starting 3rd position as home position was widespread. Interesting. I would like to follow up this research and experiment with future students. However, most of my kids do orchestra at school where nobody is shifting and use 1st position mainly. It would be hard for them to fit in.

x) I don't feel I have enough experience with beginners or third position beginners to really weigh in, but I agree that left hand shape is one of the most difficult things to master.

xi) I am interested in this idea of starting students in the 3rd position, but I am not sure what the advantages and disadvantages would be as I do not have enough information (ie research, method books or enough personal observation of other teachers students and players) to really form an opinion. I would be very curious to find out more. It may help students to bring up the violin

more naturally. There would be a greater difference in string length and stopped notes starting in 3rd vs 1st position - not sure what effect this would have (if any).

xii) I don't have much experience in education starting in 3rd position. I hope it will work for your query. Good luckvv

Category 6: Those who think the third position is advantageous, and/or use/have used/think they could use the third position

i) When doing remedial work for left hand positioning and balance, I use third position for more comfort because distances are smaller, avoiding the need to stretch. Also balancing the hand on the two middle fingers in third positions allows the student to get a better feel for the 1st finger "stretching" back. In the same way, touching the instrument with the heel of the hand avoids the wrist bending out/back when placing the 4th finger. I use this strategy both on violin and viola.

ii) For younger students (smaller hands), third position provides better reference points for the hand and reduces the 'slumping heel' problem that some fall into. Starting in third position also reduces anxiety about using higher positions.

iii) I would be interested in learning more about starting students in 3rd position. I think it could stop students having a bent left wrist, or clutching the neck of the violin

iv) I am not against beginning in the third position. In fact, although I have not applied it, slight contact of the wrist with the rib in the third position may ensure correct shaping of the hand. I have not chosen the way of beginning in the third position, but not because I am against it; complete opposition may be considered conservative. We must be open to developments beyond the classical training we have received.

v) I would say that beginning with the 3rd position might be an advantage because of the smaller gaps between fingers because 1st position requires students to stretch their fingers more, and this situation may cause difficulty for students regarding producing accurate sound. So, I would be in support of using 3rd position as the starting point for not only young children but for everyone who wants to learn violin/viola. It depends on the students's needs and the decision of the teacher.

vi) I have had little experience in starting students in Third Position. However, thinking about this technique now, I think that it could be very advantageous for some students. I would considering using this now for some of my students.

vii) I think third position is slightly more comfortable for the hand position. because space between fingers is smaller. For that reason it is easier for the 4th finger position too. Specially for small kids. I know some German teaching methods teach third position at the beginning. But they mix it with first position. I have never heard of starting on the third position.

viii) Beginning with third position would be more appropriate for mature learners who would have less difficulty with the associated theory that is required as a beginner, for example the open string names.

ix) I think third position would be useful if the wrist position is not correct or the student has other problems. They could then move back to first position more successfully

x) If I would have more students whose age is below five, I would mostly start teaching left hand technique on the 3. Position

xi) I have not used this but believe it would be helpful for left hand position

xii) Not sure although would be interested to try

xiii) Sounds intriguing. Has crossed my mind a couple of times, and more than once have mentioned to students that third position it's under the fingers better anyway. C major on violin would be a great one to start with, and I suppose 1st and 2nd fingers would become your home base for checking against open strings. Look forward to seeing what comes of it!

xiv) a) Easier to use when playing without music as the relationship to open string notation. If notation and ear concept in place it is easier

b) Improved neutral hand position

c) Student can focus on cantilevering and using correct supporting muscle groups

d) More dependency on 4th finger which prevents blocks with its usage

xv) I teach beginners without shoulder pads or chinrests, using only the left arm to hold up the instrument. No looking down the fingerboard, but looking at the ceiling. The students does use a wash cloth, and, after about a month, I replace the chinrest, and allow the chin to only touch it on down shifting, after a basic start is made in third position.

xvi) This is an interesting approach. My first inclination was to say that I did not start students in 3rd position but I neglected to consider that I DO start them with left hand (little finger) plucking over the fingerboard in 3rd position. But soon after when we put LH fingers down we do return to first position

xvii) This would permit using a larger better sounding instrument.

xviii) It had not occurred to me to start in 3rd position, but it would be of particular advantage to violin students beginning viola

Category 7: Those who think a beginning position should be selected according to each student's needs

i) The yes/no questions are difficult to answer. It would be more useful to be able to comment on in what circumstances first or third position would be 'useful' as opposed to 'better' to start teaching with. I happen to teach some students, depending on age, skill and goals, 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions almost simultaneously so having to pick one option does not apply in my case.

ii) Starting in 3rd position is one of many choices that we as string teachers can make within the private studio. It definitely helps wrist placement, however at this point I can't say for sure it provides a technical advantage to students, given that other skills have to be developed more (e.g. elbow movement). I would starting in either position pose equal amounts of difficulty and benefits. Neat study! I hope you plan to do a quantitative follow up. I would be eager to see the results.

iii) I think that 1 position is the fastest way to learn all the patterns of the left hand and make the student able to play in many different keys. On the contrary, 3 position helps the hand shape, the shoulder's relaxation, reduces the tension and brings closer right and left hand

Category 8: Those who find the study interesting and necessary; critiques and suggestions

i) Very interesting study. I look forward to the results. Your opinion about the method Colourstrings?

ii) I would very much like to see the results of this survey--could you please pass them through AMIS when you have them? This is an important topic and I once again considered starting with 3rd position again last fall. Good luck!

iii) Interesting Question

iv) With my students I use the third position as a way to practice vibrato. It's very helpful indeed. Thank you for the survey. It was very interesting. Greetings.

v) I suggest you will only get half the story by surveying teachers but not soliciting responses from a random selection of students (contacted via their teachers with their permission and their parents' permission where applicable) to see what they think. Learning is as important as teaching – and arguably more important when it is considered that learning can take place without teaching whereas teaching without learning is of no account.

vi) Some of the questions would be provided with an answer like "not so sure", except yes and no.

vii) The survey needs some "maybe" options when answering the first few questions.

viii) The questionnaire doesn't give 'maybe' as a choice. I am guessing with a lot of these questions. I tried starting a student in 3rd position many years ago and I can't remember why it didn't work. All the best with your work in this area!

ix) It is a good idea.

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